

Moderators' Report/  
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCSE Music 5MU02  
Composing Music

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Publications Code UG036473

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Pleasing trends found over the last three years of which this unit has ran have been the accuracy of administration, much clearer presentation of scores, better quality recordings and live vocals presented in the recordings of songs.

The general standard was slightly higher than last year as teachers develop strategies to teach the weaker students formulas to work from. However there is a trend towards too much formulaic teaching. The most common example being centres who submitted a minimalist piece from area of study 2 and a blues piece from area of study 3. Both genres rely to some extent on formulas but too much reliance on approaches such as this can leave little scope for creativity and inhibit the higher achieving candidates.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE AREAS OF STUDY**

Centres seemed clearer this year about the importance of a brief as the basis for a composition. The clarity and intention of compositions were much improved this year.

### **Area of Study 1**

The majority of the compositions were entered from this area. Ternary compositions are proving the most popular. Higher scoring compositions which include a recapitulation of the A section with musical development within the B section and the recapitulated A are increasing. At the lower end, cut and paste A sections with completely different and unrelated B sections are still submitted.

Rondos were also popular with imaginative and related sections to their main themes. Variations and Ground Bass compositions are popular although at one end of the spectrum of the mark scheme these pieces are masquerading as minimalist pieces and as a result the compositions can be inadequately structured and lacking any kind of melodic development. Higher marks in Theme and Variations and Ground Bass compositions are achieved by genuine melodic and rhythmic growth rather than just constant layering of musical lines and instruments. It would be pleasing to see growth of rhythmic cells by various transformations in these compositions rather than the usual crotchet to quaver to semi quaver plan of several submitted pieces.

Many of the compositions based on the Chopin model continue to delight.

### **Area of Study 2**

Minimalism is by far the most popular choice of piece in this area of study. Once again we had many fine modals based on the Steve Reich third movement from Electric Counterpoint. It should be pointed out that this piece was written for electric guitar and therefore had musical figurations written for the instrument. We had many pieces scored for guitar that were almost unplayable on the actual instrument!

Many teachers are allowing pieces to be submitted that are solely ostinati and the only minimalist content in the piece is the laying that ensues. To score highly, these pieces must contain several elements of the genre such as augmentation, diminution, phase shifting, phasing, rhythmic development and displacement. It is also worth bearing in mind that this

genre of piece does need some time to fully present ideas. Many were compromised by brevity.

Compositions from songs from musicals were more appropriate to the genre this year. Many centres supplied the dramatic stimulus for the piece. When centres submit an instrumental piece based on the study of the Bernstein song it would be appreciated if the context in relation to the area of study is made clear. There is still a trend to try and submit a second "pop song in disguise" into this area of study.

The serial pieces submitted this year were generally of a high standard and well presented. It is much appreciated when centres supply a list of the forms of tone rows and sometimes even make notes on the pieces where and in what form of manifestation they occur.

### **Area of Study 3**

Pop songs were by far the most popular options for this area of study. It was pleasing to note the increase in live vocals this year. This resulted in a noticeable improvement in word setting. Some vocal pieces submitted with the allotted vocal "Ah" sound set from Sibelius can sound unpleasant and can result in clumsy vocal writing as the student has no real opportunity to hear how the words sound when sung live. The improvement in guitar and bass guitar figurations goes hand in hand with the increased popularity of the instrument.

Many candidates have entered blues compositions this year. At the upper end of the scale many reflect the harmonically adventurous Miles Davis piece with many experiments in extending and developing form and melodic content. However the majority of blues pieces submitted were formula driven traditional three chord pieces. I'm sure given the popularity of this area of study; candidates would prefer to express themselves in a more contemporary genre.

Dance pieces tend to be the lowest scoring pieces and once more, centres are requested to outline all samples used and the precise nature of the candidate's contribution to the piece. Although many of these pieces contain the basic elements of the genre, very few compositions submitted had imaginative rhythmic and textural subtleties of the style. Many of the Garage Band pieces used fantastic sound sets and samples but left very little for the candidate to input genuine ideas of their own.

### **Area of Study 4**

This has been a less popular choice this year. We have had some interesting Fusion pieces but the influence of western music is still prevalent in the majority of compositions. This is regrettable as there is so much potential to be gained here from a study of Rag Desh and Koko.

Many candidates choose pop songs with a British folk influence. African drumming is still a popular choice. Many fine examples of the genre using cross-rhythms and syncopations score highly.

### **SCORES**

The overall presentation of the scores submitted was good. The majority of centres have used Sibelius, Cubase or E Logic to produce the candidates' scores. A few centres submitted hand written compositions. Weaker scores have no instruments indicated or musical detail added.

Written commentaries continue to be a variable option for candidates who have difficulty notating their piece. However it must be stressed that musical detail; form, chords instrumentation, texture style of melody and accompaniment should all be alluded to. This will help to account for discrepancies in the presentation of recordings. For example it is hard to evaluate the melody of a song when it is sung with doubtful intonation and only lyrics and chords provided with which to assess it. Lyrics sheets only are not a suitable score. Lyrics with chord progressions and comments about the detail, (e.g. style of accompaniment used in the piece) are the best ways to produce a notation-free score.

Although a greater percentage of screenshots were produced this year, a few candidates have submitted screenshots which lacked detailed annotation. These were often badly photocopied and were impossible to read. This can cause several problems in the moderation of these pieces. Centres are requested to make sure all detail is clearly readable when submitting screenshots in lieu of scores. The better presented screenshots were often in colour with relevant musical detail marked at the appropriate point on the track lines.

### **TEACHER EXAMINER ASSESSMENTS**

Teacher examiner comments are more realistic now with many insightful comments given to support their assessment. Many provide musical examples in addition to using appropriate wording from the assessment grids. There has been an increase in teacher examiners using the notes facility on Sibelius to indicate worthy points in compositions. This is very helpful in minimalist compositions and serial pieces.

Some confusion was caused by teacher examiners using words from one assessment grid and then awarding marks from another.

Regrettably, teacher examiners who choose to make no comments on the MUS 200 Forms do not assist moderators in the interpretation of their assessment. It is always helpful for a moderator to be able to clearly define the reasons for marks awarded by the teacher examiner.

It becomes problematic to assess criterion A when no information is given about the brief set for the candidate. Clear guidance in terms of briefs is important for the candidate to establish clear goals and working practice. There were centres where the TE had not written any brief at all on the MUS200 form, and compositions echoed this unstructured method. Briefs such as "Write a pop song" or "Compose a piece of music for your own instrument" were also often ineffective in outcome. The best written briefs were those that placed the composition in a clear genre with a clear purpose, and provided suggestions for what the candidates should include in their music.

Teacher examiners are beginning to provide information on the space on the back of the MUS Form. This is especially useful when candidates are composing technology based pieces where the teacher examiner can provide such information as what loops, samples and software were used.

## **USE OF THE COMPULSORY CORE CRITERIA**

### **Criterion A: Use and development of ideas**

Many candidates scored four or five for this criterion as the compositions intentions and relation to area of study were clear. Many candidates had ensured that the relevant techniques for the area of study had been included.

Compositions that were ambiguous in their choice of area of study would tend to score three or two. Minimalist style compositions that mainly included ostinati and layering with few other techniques from the genre tended to score low marks.

### **Criterion B: Exploitation of the medium**

High marks were awarded to students who wrote music that was appropriate for the ensemble selected, exploiting their full potential. It is important to teach the various writing styles and idioms for particular instruments. There were many instances of inappropriate voicing such as trombones playing in the flute register. Candidates should consider instrumental choice carefully. Many candidates would be horrified to hear the aural outcome of what they had written for an instrument. This can be the drawback of using Sibelius recordings.

### **Criterion C: Structure and form**

This was much better this year and many candidates made use of slight additions to the chosen form to score four marks. Those who used imaginative forms with internal development scored five. However many teacher examiners awarded full marks for pieces that were simple and clear in structure and had minimal additions or development to the accepted form. Minimalist pieces were often too short to be awarded four or five marks for proportion and development. There must be a sense of proportion and direction/growth in a piece to score higher marks. A score of three is standard for a simple and clear structure without any additional layer of sophistication added.

### **Optional criteria**

These were not assessed as accurately as the compulsory criteria and often teacher examiners were generous in the awarding of marks.

### **Criterion D: Melody**

Full marks were often awarded to melodies that were mainly scalar with the odd conventional leap and had balanced phrasing. A mark of three is awarded to a melody that works and has some sense of shape. This has to work with the other parts. The more imaginative melodies had some character and style in accordance with the area of study and genre.

### **Criterion E: Harmony/accompaniment**

Some improvement is noted in the use of these criteria with accompaniment being assessed in addition to the chords used. It must be stressed that context is important here. A piano accompaniment that used three block triads in a blues piece would veer towards the basic use of harmony whereas three chords presented within a riff would score in the simple but appropriate style assessment grid.

More research time could be spent on comparing the different accompaniment styles in the set works. There is enough variety in them to provide candidates with suitable models for their own pieces.

### **Criterion F: Texture**

This was the most popular third criterion used. It is pleasing to hear that candidates are aware of the sounds and combination of sounds they would like to use. Weaker compositions in this area use odd combinations of sound, often not labeled in the score. This would tend to indicate limited or adequate awareness of texture. Compositions that displayed typical instrumental or vocal wiring for the instruments chosen, used imaginatively with subtle changes, were the pieces that scored highly.

### **Criterion G: Rhythm**

Full marks for use of rhythm cannot be awarded to pieces that use simple rhythms of perhaps just crotchets and quavers, even with balanced phrases. The higher scoring candidates used syncopation effectively as imaginative rhythmic melodic motifs that developed as the piece progresses. It is harder to use rhythmic development in pop songs although the jazz solo breaks or lead guitar breaks typical of area of study 3 pieces gives opportunities for candidates to develop this feature.

### **Criterion H: Dynamics**

Marks of 3 and 4 are awarded to compositions that seem to have dynamics added as an afterthought. At best this can only be assessed as sometimes appropriate. There was a pleasing trend toward thoughtful effective use of dynamics. It would be pleasing to see more use of dynamics in pieces from area of study three.

### **Criterion I: Use of technology**

It is important to give as much information about the candidates use of technology on the MUS Forms as possible. Candidates who have merely inputted musical data would score low marks. In pieces that are typical of the genre, credit will be given to sound manipulation.

## **ARRANGEMENTS**

Whereas there has been an increase in submissions it was rare to receive arrangements that were original. Careful examination of the mark scheme is advised for teachers offering this option to students. The mark scheme can provide useful guidance and direction for students attempting this option. Some arrangements were submitted without the original stimulus being included. It should not be assumed that because a piece is well-known, the inclusion of the stimulus is not needed. Many arrangements were assessed using the composing assessment grids.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Moderators reported a pleasing improvement in administration from teacher examiners. We are also grateful for the prompt responses we received from centres with requests for additional material, non- asterisked highest or lowest candidates or asking for clarification on candidate's work. However it is worth highlighting the following particular administrative issues.

Centres should ensure that they:

- Provide all the compositions on one CD.
- Check that the sound is actually on the CD.
- Provide a track list.
- Ensure that the students track is correctly labeled in the appropriate box on the MUS form.
- Ensure announcements of candidate's names are on a different track to their compositions. Announcements of candidates' names are not necessary if the track has been advertised on both MUS Form and track list.
- Check that each composition comes from a different Area of Study.
- Provide an A3 sheet folded so that the MUS form comes as one sheet.
- Check that all signatures are present.
- Check that the highest and lowest scoring candidates are included in the starred sample. If they are not they should be included along with all the other candidates in the starred sample.
- Please ensure work arrives by or on the deadline
- Please check transfer and arithmetical processes.

Once again it is a delight to hear the range and creativity of our student compositions. Let us hope that this will continue to improve and flourish. Thank you for your hard work.

Ofqual



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